

SPORT



Bangladesh's new batting coach Thilan Samaraweera (L) has a chat with star batsman Tamim Iqbal, who returned to practice yesterday after being sidelined with injury for three weeks, during the Tigers' training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tamim back on track

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal batted for the first time in three weeks yesterday and judging by the way he flayed both pacers and spinners from the centre pitch at Mirpur, it seems as though he will be ready for the Afghanistan series which is set to begin on September 25.

Tamim had fractured the little finger on his left hand during catching practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on August 27. He was asked to rest for three weeks.

Yesterday, Tamim underwent a CT scan in the afternoon and the result of the scan was positive. It showed that he had improved a lot and it also gave him the green signal to hit the nets later in the evening.

He arrived at Mirpur at 4 pm along with the rest of the team yesterday and waited for everyone's batting sessions to end. Until then he was busy warming up.

Around three hours later Tamim went to the centre pitch, a quarter of which was surrounded by a net, and started facing the likes of Al-Amin Hossain, Mahmudullah Riyad and a few net bowlers.

His cover drives off Al-Amin seemed well-timed while one of his slog sweeps off a spinner actually went on to hit the stands. Both the head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and batting consultant Thilan Samaraweera seemed happy with Tamim's effort.

After completing his batting session, Tamim spoke to reporters on his way back to the dressing room and said that he was feeling a lot better.

"The report said that the fracture in my finger is still there but it's not that serious and if I want I can bat. That's why I batted today to see if it hurts. It didn't hurt at all and I felt completely normal. So that's a good sign."

'Want to get them into the groove'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's newly appointed batting consultant Thilan Samaraweera has said that his first target will be to help the Tigers 'get into the groove' of international cricket and help them overcome the jitters that a team generally faces after not playing at the highest level for a while.

"I think the biggest thing is getting them to the groove of international cricket," said the former Sri Lanka batsman who attended his first day at work at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

"I am not worried about the talent because talent is readily available. At least that's what I believe after watching them on TV and

watching them here. I think they need to get into that groove because when you haven't played international cricket for five to six months, the scenario becomes a little different," he added.

Bangladesh have not played an ODI or Test this year. While they did enjoy a brilliant run in 2015, they are yet to get off the mark this year and that seems to be Samaraweera's main concern at the moment.

"My first priority is the Afghanistan series. Because I know that no matter how much you practise in the nets, it's different when you play in front of a packed stadium with 25,000 people. They have to be in the right groove from the first ball when they face England. The first focus will be the three games against Afghanistan and from there we will take the

England series," the Sri Lankan said.

The 39-year-old further said that he was really excited to take charge of a 'great bunch' of cricketers. He also hinted at the influence that head coach Chandika Hathurusingha had on him when he was a player.

"If I have to break down my career into two... my playing career from 2001 to 2006 was different. I got dropped and then I met Chandika. I was a completely different cricketer from there on. My average after that was between 50 and 60.

"I know what he is capable of and I love to work with him. I think he helped changed my technique and he gave me the freedom to express myself," explained Samaraweera.

Samaraweera believes that Hathurusingha had a similar effect

on the entire Bangladesh team.

"I think what Chandika and the coaching staff gave [the Bangladeshi players] more freedom and now they believe that they can fight with the top teams.

"We saw in the last 18 months when they beat India, Pakistan, South Africa and even reached the Asia Cup final. They nearly upset India in India. I think that's a big change. They believe in themselves more now and they have plenty of freedom and I think those are healthy requirements," said the 39-year-old.

Samaraweera has been signed up by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) until the end of the England series. Whether the BCB will keep him on until the 2019 World Cup or not will depend upon his performance in the next two series.

Expect more action as league resumes today

SPORTS REPORTER



The last two weeks have been dominated by the under-16 women's team's tale of success as well as the ultimate failure of the men's senior national team, but now the time has come to shift this focus to the domestic scene as the Bangladesh Premier League resumes today after a one-month break with the expectation that the league will continue to be as competitive as the first six rounds.

The first 36 matches of the ninth edition of the league, which is being held in four different venues, have been full of action, and four teams -- Rahmatganj MFS, Muktijoddha Sangsad, Sheikh Jamal DC and Abahani -- are on the top of the 12-team table while big-spenders Chittagong Abahani and Sheikh Russel KC lag behind.

A total of 99 goals have been scored at an average of 2.75 goals per match, with 55 of those coming from local players who played key roles in deciding the fate of the matches. A total of 19 matches produced results while 17 matches ended in draws.

Rahmatganj and Muktijoddha Sangsad pulled off a couple of surprise results against the big guns to ensure a spot on top of the table whereas giants like Mohammedan SC, Sheikh Russel and Brothers Union are left frustrated.

It is a common phenomenon that most participating teams struggle to keep their

tempo after breaks due to a lack of preparation, however, this time all the teams have more or less remained active with a short break to celebrate Eid-ul-Azha.

"Eighty percent of the teams have been in the training camp since the end of the sixth round [August 20] and I think you will see the same competitiveness from the teams. In my squad, four to five players have recovered from their injuries during this break," said Rahmatganj coach Kamal Babu, who hopes his side grab the solo lead after resumption.

Siyo Zunapio has been the key factor behind Rahmatganj's rise; the Congolese is now the top striker of the league as well with five goals in six matches. Sheikh Jamal's Wedson Anselme, Muktijoddha Sangsad's Ahmed Kolo Musa and Abahani's Sunday Chizoba follow in second position with four goals each.

There have also been changes at the helms amongst different clubs as coach Shafiqul Islam Manik has replaced Maruful Haque at Sheikh Russel KC, who are on the bottom of the table after five defeats from six matches. Holders Sheikh Jamal DC flew in a Swedish coach last night while Brothers Union replaced Bal Gopal Maharjan with Syed Nayeemuddin.

Today Sheikh Jamal will take on fellow leaders Muktijoddha Sangsad at the Bangabandhu National Stadium under floodlights after Team BJMC and Uttar Baridhara square off at 4:30pm.

Sk Jamal fly in Swedish coach

SPORTS REPORTER

Swedish coach Lars Goran Stefan Hansson was scheduled to land in the capital last night to guide holders Sheikh Jamal DC through the rest of the season.

The 58-year-old UEFA pro licensed coach, who last coached Indonesian top-flight side Persela Lamongan after guiding a number of clubs in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Seychelles, Vietnam and Myanmar, is expected to be at the dugout today for the defending Bangladesh Premier League champions who will be taking on Muktijoddha Sangsad in Dhaka.

With six rounds of the league completed, the Dhanmondi giants top the table alongside three others. The club has been managed by interim coaches ever since Shafiqul Islam Manik's contract was terminated before the league began.

The three-time league champions earlier failed in their bid to rope in former coach Joseph Afusi due to an embargo on the Nigerian imposed by the Asian Football Federation.

"We have been desperately searching for a professional coach and have finally found one. We played the first six league matches with no proper coach. But now with the experience of Hansson, we hope the club will move further forward in the league," said Sheikh Jamal's technical adviser Ashraf Uddin Ahmed Chunnua.

Moeen feels no pressure

STAR SPORT DESK



Of the England cricketers to come to Bangladesh at the end of September, spin-bowling all-rounder Moeen Ali will probably play one of the most crucial roles during the three-ODI and two-Test tour in October.

Being the most experienced spinner in England's camp, he will have a big role to play both in Bangladesh and during the tour of India that follows soon after. Historically England sides have not had the best of times in the spin-friendly subcontinent wickets, so the pressure will be on England's spinners to deliver.

However, Moeen is not feeling much pressure. He told Press Association Sport: "With the conditions probably more suited to my game, I feel like I will have a big role to play at some stage and I'm hoping I can play a big part in us winning both series."

"I think I'll be in the game more with it being in the subcontinent and spin is probably the biggest threat. But I don't feel any pressure at all. There's always pressure on you playing in international cricket."



"You've just got to deal with it as best as you can. I've had some ups and downs with the ball, but I feel like it's made me a better bowler each time."

He opens the batting in ODIs, but his recent role with the willow in Tests is to shore up the lower order at number eight. His fine form this summer -- which yielded centuries against Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- may yet result in a promotion.

"It's an option, I think. I'm sure the selectors and the coach and the captain are probably thinking about it, but, like I've always said, wherever they ask me to bat, I'll bat there," he said.

England's winter tour starts with the ODI series against Bangladesh, the team that dumped them out of the 2015 World Cup. Moeen, a part of a team that has since undergone a dramatic transformation into an aggressive and successful outfit, remembers that result.

"We are very wary of Bangladesh. They beat us in Australia, we know they can play, but we're a completely different side now."

"It's different now playing in a different continent, but we feel like we're a side that's getting better and we can play this kind of cricket anywhere we go, so we're very excited."

Monetary rewards for U-16 girls

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is to accord a reception for the national under-16 women's team for its successful AFC U-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers campaign at a hotel in the capital today.

The girls emerged from Group C as champions of quality, and next face the eight-team final round where they will vie against Japan, China, Thailand, South Korea, North Korea, Australia and Laos during September next year.

The game's governing body has already declared a year-long training programme for the team with the pledge of providing accommodation, education, food, and monthly allowances for the team members. In addition, the players are now expected to receive some monetary awards as a few corporate houses have shown interest.

It has been learnt that Saif Global Sports, Gemcon Group and Caldwell Development Ltd. will jointly provide the 23 players and coaching staff Tk 1.25 lakh each while SS Solution is expected to provide monthly allowance to each of the players.

The girls will also be given another reception tomorrow at the BFF House where Walton will be to disburse its promised Tk 5 lakh among the girls.

No blacklist for Morgan

AFP, London



England supremo Andrew Strauss has said there will be no "blacklist" for Eoin Morgan despite the one-day captain, along with fellow batsman Alex Hales, opting out of the Bangladesh tour on security grounds.

Former England captain Strauss said the decision would not be held against the pair, with Morgan set to lead the one-day side on their subsequent tour of India.

to be any recriminations," Strauss said Sunday.

"It's not like these guys are going to be black-listed and their names will not be put forward for selection. They absolutely will be," Strauss added. "Both have done outstanding jobs for England over the last 12 months, especially Eoin Morgan whose captaining has been sensational."

"Of course, we can't give any guarantees because the situation might change on the ground in Bangladesh. Someone might come in and do unbelievably well, but the intention is for Eoin to come back in as captain and Alex will be in the mix for selection as well."



Bangladesh under-16 women's team players enjoy a kickabout at the BFF Artificial Turf on the opening day of their residential camp yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF